Fellows Column:
Change or Creative Transformation

By Nathan Aaron Rosen

Imagine stepping into a library. The scent of aged paper and leather bound spines fills the air, mingling with the faint, almost imperceptible hum of digital devices. Sunlight streams through towering windows, illuminating rows upon rows of silent sentinels – books that hold the collective knowledge of humanity. But beneath this serene façade, a quiet revolution is brewing.

The digital age has unleashed a relentless torrent of change upon these hallowed halls. Once bastions of quiet contemplation, libraries now find themselves at a crossroads. Will they merely adapt, tweaking existing services to accommodate the digital deluge? Or will they boldly reimagine their role, transforming into vibrant community hubs that pulse with creativity and innovation? Picture two paths diverging before you, shrouded in mist. One is well-trodden, familiar, and safe – the path of incremental change. The other represents uncertainty, beckoning with whispers of uncharted territory – the path of creative transformation. Which path will libraries choose? The answer will determine their fate in the 21st century.

This exploration is not just an academic exercise; it is a quest for survival. It is a roadmap for libraries to evolve from repositories of the past to architects of the future. By understanding the subtle yet profound differences between change and creative transformation, librarians and information professionals can chart a course that not only keeps pace with societal shifts but also actively shapes the future of information services.

In the ever-shifting landscape of information services, libraries stand as beacons of knowledge, constantly adapting to the tides of change. Yet, in this digital age where information flows like a torrent, merely changing is no longer enough. Imagine a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly; while change might be akin to the caterpillar growing larger, creative transformation is the dramatic shift from crawling to soaring. Libraries must undergo a metamorphosis, embracing creative transformation to remain vibrant and relevant in their communities. This is the distinction between survival and thriving in an era of unprecedented technological and social upheaval.

Change and creative transformation are often used interchangeably, but they have distinct differences. Understanding these differences is essential for libraries and information institutions to stay relevant and thrive. Think of it as the difference between renovating an existing house and conceiving an entirely new type of dwelling.

ASPECT	CHANGE	CREATIVE
Scope	Small, isolated	Holistic, far-reaching
Approach	Tactical, linear	Strategic, iterative
Focus	Immediate issues	Long-term innovation
Outcome	Improved existing	New, innovative solutions
Resistance Management	Adjustments to change management strategy	Addressing organizational culture and leadership styles
Examples	Upgrading technology	Developing makerspaces, AI-driven services

Similarities between Change and Creative Transformation

Change and creative transformation differ in significant ways, however they do share many fundamental commonalities. Both involve a transition from the status quo towards a new state. Both necessitate a willingness to adapt and evolve. Both are frequently spurred by external factors, such as technological advancements or shifts in user expectations, therefore both invariably involve addressing resistance and managing stakeholder expectations. Both processes require vision and leadership. Both can enhance services and user experiences.

The two approaches can also be seen on a spectrum, where the distinction is determined by the degree of difference between the original state and the intended goal. For example, the shift from print to digital resources exemplifies a change that can drive creative transformation, prompting the development of novel digital collections and services. Implementing a new library management system encompasses both change (upgrading technology) and creative transformation (reimagining user interactions).

Key differences between Change and Creative Transformation

While change and creative transformation share certain similarities and objectives, they diverge significantly in their depth, scope, and ultimate impact.

Change is often tactical, small, isolated, and typically incremental, focused on solving a specific problem or improving an existing process. Creative transformation, conversely, is strategic, holistic, far reaching, and radical. It demands deeper shifts in organizational culture and leadership approaches. In practice, change typically involves a more linear approach or minor adjustment, addressing immediate issues. Creative transformation often embraces an iterative and experimental methodology, fostering long-term innovation and adaptability. Change improves what exists while transformation creates something new.

CHANGE	CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION
Transition from physical card catalogs to an online catalog system	Creating a digital library with AI driven search capabilities
Shifting from Dewey Decimal to another classification system	Reimagining the library as a community hub
Updating a book edition	Creating an interactive multimedia e-book

Creative Transformation in Libraries

Libraries and library service have been in a state of constant change, adapting to evolving user needs and technological advancements. While libraries adapt, their core functions endure – to provide cost efficient and user-friendly access to information and to foster a love of reading.

Information professionals have and continue to provide information resources, evaluate critical information, organize information, and train users on best techniques to use information tools. Libraries are uniquely positioned to drive creative transformation within their communities, effectively leveraging their role as hubs for learning, innovation, and creative activity.

Libraries can establish makerspaces (where patrons can work on creative projects) and provide access to emerging technologies, such as 3D printing, virtual reality, and coding. This development reflects a fundamental shift in how libraries approach community engagement and learning. The Chicago Public Library's Maker Lab exemplifies creative transformation in action, providing community members with access to cutting-edge technologies and resources. Libraries can engage with their communities through outreach programs, workshops, and events that foster creativity and innovation. By strategically partnering with local organizations, businesses, and educational institutions, libraries can effectively drive creative transformation and economic development.

Both change and transformation can meet resistance, as they may challenge established practices and require staff and patrons to adapt to new ways of operating. Common hurdles to creative transformation that must be overcome include budget constraints, staff resistance, technological limitations, and community skepticism, as well as the natural human tendency of not wanting to change. But they can be defeated by enthusiasm and a clear plan articulating the benefits of change and the detriment of maintaining the status quo.

Innovative Ideas for Creative Transformation

Here are some innovative concepts for fostering creative transformation within libraries and information institutions:

- **Virtual and Augmented Reality Experiences:** Develop immersive virtual reality experiences that allow users to explore new worlds, historical events, or cultural heritage sites. Include virtual tours of the library collection and immersive learning experience.
- **AI-Powered Research Assistants:** Utilize AI to enhance cataloging and search capabilities. Develop AI-powered research assistants that can aid users navigating complex databases, identify relevant sources, and provide personalized reading and research recommendations based upon user preferences and reading history.
- **Community-Driven Archives:** Establish archives that empower users to contribute their own stories, photos, and artifacts, thereby creating a rich and diverse cultural heritage collection. Examples include the British Library's use of digital archives to preserve and provide access to historical documents.
- **Makerspaces for Social Impact:** Establish makerspaces that focus on social impact, such as developing assistive technologies, creating sustainable products or addressing community challenges.

Conclusion

Change and creative transformation, while sharing some similarities and common ground, diverge in their scope, nature, drivers, approach, and outcomes. Both are essential to growth and enduring relevance of the information profession. Change typically represents a refinement of the existing, while creative transformation signifies a bold leap into the uncharted territory. By understanding these distinctions, we can better navigate the complexities of our world, embrace innovation, and shape a future filled with possibilities.

Libraries and information institutions must nimbly navigate both change and creative transformation to remain relevant and thrive. To that end, libraries and information services must proactively evolve to meet changing needs, with librarians playing a critical key role in guiding communities through these processes.

Creative transformation requires a fundamental shift in perspective, approach, or culture, which can lead to more radical and innovative outcomes. Libraries are uniquely positioned to drive creative transformation within their communities, effectively leveraging their role as hubs for learning, innovation, and creativity.

Therefore, as librarians and information professionals, let us embrace the challenge of creative transformation, leveraging our expertise, creativity, and unwavering passion to drive innovation and positive change in our communities so that we can most effectively serve our patrons and community.

As facilitators of knowledge, let us guide information professionals as they navigate and adapt to changes. As innovators, let us actively contribute to creative transformation through the development of new services and technologies, thus ensuring that we continue to be vital centers for learning, discovery, engagement, and answering the questions posed by our patrons.

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Author's Note: Using AI in Content Development

Various Generative AI tools were used to brainstorm the ideas of change versus creative transformation including Copilot, Gemini, ChatGPT, Grok, Perplexity, Meta AI, and Claude. Each provided interesting and stimulating ideas, examples, and suggested ways to describe the process. Use of this new innovative tool is recommended at the article development stage as each provides unique ideas based upon their particular Large Language Model and algorithm. Training on how to effectively use Gen AI is absolutely necessary to provide useful results. Teaching prompt engineering, like database search, is a prime opportunity for information professionals to stay relevant and enlarge our public footprint.